



Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Status 2002

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

Resolving questions

January, 2003

Certification requirements for responsible, backup, and shift operators

Determining how many operators, what type of operator, and if each certified operator has to have a specific "title" or "name" can be confusing. Let's look at what the certification requirements are for water systems and for individual operators.

Which water systems are required to have certified operators?

Every seasonal or year-round public drinking water system that uses **surface water**, every year-round residential community water system, and every year-round/non-residential nontransient non-community water system (see "Definitions," page 3) must have a certified operator.

If you fall into any of these categories, whether your system serves 25 or 180,000 people year-round, you are required to meet the rule requirements for certified operators. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 300 and Section 554.01.)

What is required of each water system mentioned above?

□ It is the responsibility of the owners of each public water system mentioned above to designate a certified operator to be in responsible charge of the system at all times the system is in operation. The owner must designate a responsible charge (RC) operator who is certified at a class equal to or greater than the classification of the water system. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 003.52 & .63 and Section .554.)

□ It is also the responsibility of the owner of the water system to employ a RC operator who has a valid certificate. This means it is the responsibility of the

system owner to ensure the designated RC operator(s) keeps current on training and renewal requirements so the validity of his/her certificate can be maintained.

□ Conversely, it is the responsibility of the individual operator who makes distribution or treatment system decisions about water quality, water quantity or public health issues to become certified and to maintain that certification from year to year. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 554.03 and .04)

What makes someone a "responsible charge operator?"

A "responsible charge operator" directly supervises a drinking water treatment system or a drinking water distribution system when the system is in operation.

The responsible charge operator must be actively on-site and/or on-call on a **daily** basis. The RC operator takes responsibility for decisions about water quality, water quantity, or public health issues which is why the RC operator must maintain a certificate equal to or greater than the classification of the water system. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 003.52 and .63 and Section 554.)

How many certified operators are required per water system?

There must be someone in responsible charge of the public water system at all times it is in operation. This means one responsible charge operator is mandatory. More than one RC operator will be needed for many water systems.

The actual number of RC operators required for each water system is determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the system size, system complexity, the hours of system operation in each 24-hour period, RC operator availability during planned absences, RC operator coverage during unplanned absences (accidents, injuries, surgery), and any other pertinent factor. Each water system must ultimately decide how many RC operators are needed to provide responsible charge operator coverage for their system during all times of operation. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 003.52 and .63 and Section 554.)

How do we decide how many responsible charge operators are needed for our water system?

If your RC operator is, for whatever reason, totally unavailable for more than a day, then responsible charge operator coverage **must** be provided by a **different** operator who is also certified at a class equal to or greater than the system classification. *If you are out of town, out of the state, or out of the country, having a cell phone or pager so the system can check in with the RC operator daily or so the RC operator checks in with the water system daily means you can be considered "on-call."* (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 003.63 and Section 554.)

Are there different ways a water system can meet the responsible charge operator certification requirements?

Yes, choosing any of the options described below enables your water system to meet the drinking water operator certification requirements:

1. You can designate a single operator as the responsible charge operator who will have sole responsibility for making the decisions regarding water quantity, water quality, and public health. In this situation, the same operator must be available at all times the system is in operation by being on-call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (24/7).

This option also typically means notifying the water system users of the operators cell phone or pager number for off-hours emergencies.

If you select this option, please check the current coverage plan for your cell phone or pager to see how closely it adheres to the places you travel to most frequently. If necessary, you may need to adjust your coverage plan to match your travels.

2. You can designate single a operator as the primary responsible charge operator, and designate one or more secondary responsible charge operators. In this situation, the RC operator hands off RC operator duties to a second or alternate RC operator because the primary RC operator cannot be available at all times.

In this case, the water system must have another operator or operators, certified at the class equal to or greater than the water system classification, available to step-in and perform the duties of the primary RC operator in their absence.

There are several ways a water system can add one or more responsible charge operators:

- The system can designate another employee who is already a part of the water system. However, the rule does not mean every system has to employ two RC operators (both certified at a class equal to, or greater than the system classification) **all** the time the system is in operation. Having two responsible charge operators works, but the next two alternatives equally meet the rule requirement.

1) The system can designate an appropriately certified operator from another water system by arranging an exchange of services through a mutual agreement. For example, a small town has a Class II system and only one Class II operator. That town/system may develop an agreement with a nearby town or water district, also a Class II system, to have the two system's Class II operators swap duties and fill in for each other, or

2) The system can enter into a contract with an independent operator certified at the class equal to or greater than the classification of the system, who becomes the designated responsible charge operator. (IDAPA 58.01.08, Section 0003.52 and .63 and Section 554.)

Is the term “backup operator” specifically found in the rule language?

No, “backup operator” or “backup responsible charge operator” is simply a name coined during the rulemaking process to identify the operator providing temporary responsible charge coverage when the primary RC operator is unavailable.

To be more accurate, “backup” technically refers to the plan or approach chosen by each water system to address how their system will provide backup coverage for those times the responsible charge operator is unavailable. As described in the options presented above, backup does not have to be a person in every situation.

The backup position can be called by any title your like such as, “relief,” “fill-in,” “substitute,” or “alternate” to name a few. The name or title given to the position is not critical.

What is critical, and required by rule, is there must be a designated responsible charge operator(certified at a class equal to or greater that the classification of the water system) available in person and/or on-call at all times the system is in operation. (IDPA 58.01.08, Section 554.)

What is a shift operator?

If your system is large enough to have multiple shifts of employees and has a shift operator, then the rule simply says the shift operator must be certified. A shift operator is not a “responsible charge operator” or a fill-responsible operator.

The shift operator is equivalent to a mid-management type position because the person has some level of authority over personnel or equipment, but the position is ultimately subordinate to the responsible charge operator position. (IDAPA 58.01.08.554.03.)

In conclusion . . .

Every water system required to meet the operator certification requirements must have a responsible charge operator and a way to provide coverage when the responsible operator is unavailable. This can be satisfied by a backup plan, method, approach, or appropriately certified operator to provide coverage.

Is this confusing? It certainly can be, because it can mean something different to different water systems. E.g., to one Very Small Water System, it may mean one RC operator who is on-call 24/7.

Being on call 24/7 fulfills the responsible charge operator coverage for that system's backup plan. To other Very Small Water Systems, it may mean one RC operator and a second operator who fills in for the RC operator if they are out due to various reasons. The second fill-in RC operator may or may not be a system employee.

We hope these bullets provide a clear understanding of what each water system is required to do according to the Idaho Rules for Public Drinking Water Systems (IDAPA 58.01.08 Sections 003,300 & 553-562). **Note:** The information and any rule interpretation presented in this article represents the opinion of the Idaho DEQ Deputy Attorney General and EPA Region 10 in Seattle.

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Check Your CEU Status for 2002

The drinking water training (professional growth) and certification cycle is a twelve month period that starts March 1 and ends February 28 (29) annually. Please double-check your records to verify you have earned enough CEUs for the 2002 certification cycle which ends February 28, 2003.

Every drinking water operator must earn 0.6 CEUs annually whether you have one or multiple Drinking Water Certificates.

You may have certified for the first time sometime after March 1, 2002. Whether you were certified by exam or grandparenting, it is important to know that for this first certification cycle you must earn 0.6 CEUs by February 28, 2003, irrespective of what date during the certification cycle your certificate was issued. This means any relevant class you've taken and earned CEUs for after March 1, 2002 can be used to meet the 0.6 CEU requirement for the 2002 certification cycle. For example, if you took a certification exam in December 2002 and took a certification review/preparatory class before the test, but after March 2002, then the CEUs you earned for the certification review class count for your 2002 CEU (professional growth) requirement.

Remember - CEUs can **not** be carried over from one certification cycle to the next cycle. CEUs you earned in 2000 or 2001 can not be used to meet your 2002 professional growth (CEU) requirement. If you've earned 0.6 or more CEUs since March 1, 2002, then you're done for this cycle.

If you have not taken any training nor earned any CEUs since March 1, 2002, then hurry, you have less than 2 months to take a day (0.6 CEUs) of training.

If you are unsure of what training is available, please call one or all of the following trainers and request current training schedules:

- *Brown Environmental: 1-800-543-4358 or 465-5725 (Boise area),*
- *Idaho Rural Water Association: 1-800-962-3257 or 343-7001 (Boise area), or*
- *Your local Operator Section in North Idaho, SW Idaho or SE Idaho.*

Water System Definitions

Public Water System: *A system that provides piped water for human consumption if such system has at least 15 service connections or regularly serves an average of 25 individuals, 60 or more days per year.*

Community Water System: *A public water system which serves at least 15 service connections used by year-round residents or regularly serves at least 25 year-round residents (municipality, subdivision, mobile home park, apartment complex, or nursing home).*

Nontransient Noncommunity Water System: *A public water system that is not a community water system and that regularly serves at least 25 of the same persons over 6 months per year (e.g., school, hospital, day care center, or a business, factory, motel, or restaurant with 25 or more employees on site).*

Do's and Don't's of Submitting CEUs

You will receive a certification renewal notice shortly after the first of the year that asks you to return the renewal fee and documentation of CEUs (continuing education units) earned during the certification cycle.

Do not send original CEU Certificates in with your renewal fee; make a photocopy of any CEU Certificate to submit and keep the original CEU certificate for your files. Each operator is responsible for keeping the CEU certificates they receive.

If you have taken a class and cannot find your CEU certificate *do not panic*. Instead, call the TRAINER from whom you took the class. The trainer is the *only* entity that can issue you a new or duplicate certificate for their class. **DO NOT Call the CEU Director or the Board Office!** Your attendance at the training session must be reverified before a duplicate certificate can be issued and the trainer giving the class is the *only* entity that has that information.

Certification Test Dates for 2003

The certification exam dates have been changed to March and September starting in 2003. The Idaho Water/Wastewater Operator Certification Board made this change at their last board meeting. They set the following application submittal and testing dates for 2003.

March Exam	September Exam
Application Deadline: Jan 31, 2003 (Fri)	Application Deadline: July 25, 2003 (Fri)
Certification Test Date: Mar 12, 2003 (Wed)	Certification Test Date: Sept 10, 2003 (Wed)

One time training requirement for grandparented operators

A one time broad-based training class is required of every grandparented operator according to IDAPA 58.01.08.558.10 which says,

Grandparented Certificate Renewal - In the first annual certification RENEWAL cycle, grandparented operator's shall complete and show documentation of completion of training that includes all information covered by the initial certification exam . . . for the certification class the operator holds.

The quick and easy way to find out when you have to complete the onetime broad-based, comprehensive training is to look at the 8.5 X 11 Operator Certificate you were initially issued. You **must** look at the date on the **large** certificate. Do NOT use the date on your small pocket card since it is the annual expiration date, not the date of issuance.

Grandparent Certificate Date of Issue	Deadline to complete one-time training
March 1, 2001 - Feb 28, 2002	March 1, 2003
After March 1, 2002	March 1, 2004

The type of training class that covers all information included in the initial certification examination includes Certification Review classes, O&M classes, and the Basics of a Public Water System. Any of the broad based courses that are size appropriate for the size water system you operate (i.e., Very Small, Class I, Class II, etc.) will work.

The one-time broad-based training meets the annual 0.6 CEU professional growth requirement for the year it is taken. For every other training year, you may choose any other water class or workshop that is pertinent to your water system such as Cross Connection Control, Disinfection, or Pumps and Motors. ■